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## THE DATE OF THE BEWCASTLE CROSS

To one who finds it necessary each year to make an intelligent, and intelligible, statement about the date of the Bewcastle Cross, a Runic monument in Cumberland, the arguments of both Professor Cook and of Bishop Browne, of Bristol, leave much to be desired. Professor Cook's contention for the twelfth century, the reign of King David of Scotland, as the period when the Cross was erected, does not satisfy one's curiosity regarding the history plainly involved by proper names which may be read upon the Cross; and Bishop Browne, upholding the traditional date, the seventh century, adheres to the common reading of the Runic characters of the inscription which photographs do not seem to warrant. A difference of five hundred years admits of no compromise.

In such an *impasse* I felt compelled to renounce all authorities, save the photographs of Messrs. Cook, Browne and Collingwood, and with a reading-glass, not so strong as to reveal process-points, apply myself to an independent reading of the inscription. The result was better than might have been expected from such a method; it relieves one of mental reservations, and as Professor Cook's theory raised more problems than it solved, I have a feeling that the very simplicity of this result is its best advocate. All students must be grateful to these writers for their contributions to the iconography of the subject, and the recent death of Commandatore Revoira, whose decision Professor Cook invoked with finality for the twelfth century, is most regrettable.

I offer the following text, transliterated:

1	†	pIS SIGBECN	
2		pUN SETTÆ H	
3		WÆTRED WOp	
4		GAR OLWFWOL	
5		pU ÆFT ÆLCFRI	
6		pU EL(..F?)GUIN	(king)
7		EAC OISIEU	(king)
8	†	GIBED HE	
9		ON.....INÆ SÆWHULO	

## NOTES

Line 2—UN as a postpositional adjective in the older interpretations seems forced. A present plural of *þeon*, 'to do, to cause,' or a possible variant of *þon*, adv. equivalent in meaning to L. *tum*, is more reasonable. L. 3—HWÆTRED is listed as abbot in the *Liber Vitae*, and WOÞGAR as a monk. L. 5—ÆFT ÆLCFRIÞU: Professor Cook invents a lady of the twelfth century in order that Aelcfriþu may be feminine after *æft*. But in his translation of Sievers' Old English Grammar, p. 152, note 4, we are told that *u*, in masculine long stems of the *u* declension is retained in Runic *flodu* and *olwfwolþu*, the latter name, presumably masculine, occurring in the text above. But waiving Olwfwolþu, whom I cannot identify, ÆFT ÆLCFRIÞU may be read, and this name of a particular man, as will be seen below, is the only one that makes sense. If the construction does not agree with the grammar, then the grammar should be changed, rather than the text or the obvious meaning. L. 6—EL(. . F?)GUIN. This name is the special issue of this article. The line has been read by others as EAN KUNING; but -GUIN is unmistakable. The Runic character for C is consistently used in the inscription, and I fail to read it here. What name in EL. .GUIN fits properly? The necessity of harmonizing spelling in Searle's *Onomasticon* in order to compile the book at all disguises the protean nature of Saxon spelling of proper names: *Aelfwine* might or might not do. The genealogies at the end of Nennius left me in no doubt that the Aelfguin there recorded was the same as the EL. .GUIN on the Cross: "*Osguid genuit Alcfrid et Aelfguin et Aechfird*," § 57; "*Osguid genuit Ecgfird, ipse est Ecgfird Ailguin*," § 61; "*Ecgfird filius Osbiu regnavit novem annis*," § 65. But Ecfrið reigned from 670 (671 Browne) to his tragic death in the spring of 685. In the ninth year of his reign, 679, his younger brother Aelfwine was killed in battle. The story is told by Bede, and repeatedly expounded by historians. Zimmer's discussion of the Nennius genealogies ends: "Der Text lautet also ursprünglich: *Osguid genuit Alchfrid et Aelfguin et Aechfrid*. . ." The archaic forms of Osguid and Aelfguin will not escape notice: the British character of one of them on the Cross confirms Nennius, as Nennius thus confirms the Cross.

The order of these names on the Cross is important. Aelfrið had been under-king of Deira for a time, but he had trouble with his father, King Oswiu, and was said to have retired to a monastery. Ailguin-Aelfwine had been under-king of Deira but one year when he was killed in battle, supporting his brother King Ecgfrið, at the age of eighteen. He was beloved by all, even his enemies lamenting his death. Ecfrið's name, it will be observed, does not appear on the face of the Cross. The names of his brothers Aelfrið and Ailguin are there, and also that of his father Oswiu.

The novel reading after EL. .GUIN, l. 6, and after OISIEU, l. 7, I am compelled to adopt from evidence of Saxon coins, and also from the sense of the lines. If we regard Runic  $\mathfrak{X}$  as equivalent to ING, or as a patronymic adjunct, we get no sense; for, as has been stated, Ailguin was but eighteen years old at his death. On Saxon coins the king's name is followed by an upright cross,— $\dagger$ . Later, the final x of REX attracts the upright cross over on its two ends,—thus xx, (REXX). Joined top and bottom, as at the ends of ll. 6 and 7, the ligature not only implies *king*, but it also coincides with the Runic  $\mathfrak{X}$ , which, when standing for a word, meant 'prince.'

Lines 8 and 9 I pass over for the present, only remarking that Collingwood detected a definite chisel cutting on O, thus making a ligature ON.

I accept the statement of all writers that the names of Wulfhere, Cyniburgh and Cyneswið may be read on the Cross, on another side. Professor Cook read two *n*'s in Cyniburgh, upon which he further enforces his argument for a late date. Bishop Browne's objection to this is well taken, that there is too little difference between the forms of Runic N and I to warrant such an argument. What is important is that Aelfriþ, Ailguin, Oswiu, Wulfhere, Cyniburgh and Cyneswið are royal names all related by blood or marriage. They were all active in consolidating the English church in the North under Roman, as opposed to British use. Aelfrið was the inspiring genius in the movement against Iona, to which his father remained loyal as long as he could. Finally they all came together in the Roman mission, King Oswiu joining King Wulfhere of Mercia, against whom he had fought. The first martyr was young Ailguin, for "*on fruman gear*," a fragmentary inscription hitherto read on the Cross as referring to the first year of Ecgfrið's reign, I take to refer to the first year of Ailguin's reign, when he was killed. There

was nothing notable in the first year of Ecgfrið, 670 (671 Browne), unless he wished to erect a memorial to his father. In that case Ailguin's name could not have been included, for he did not die until 679.

To sum up: As Ecgfrið's name does not appear in the memorial inscription the Cross may be reasonably conceived to have been erected in his lifetime, somewhere between 679, the death of Ailguin, and 685, the year of his own death in battle against the Picts.

I select one or two minor matters for comment. Professor Cook finds GESSUS KRISTTUS, at the top of the Cross comparable only with Danish Runic spelling of the same words in the thirteenth century. If one may look ahead so many centuries from the subject-matter of the Cross, one may also look backward for an explanation of Runic X = G for initial sound of L. *Iesu*, *Iehsu*. Am I not right in thinking that this is the only English equivalent for the name in Saxon times? The universality of *haelend* amounts to taboo of English *Jesus*, or its phonetic prototype. Even Orm explains the *haelend* tradition of his time. English Runic X = G for both palatal as well as sonant stop, whereas a different character for the latter sound is found on the Continent. Looking backward for possible additional testimony I select Wordsworth and White's note under *iesu* in their edition of the Vulgate, *Gospels*, Index Nom. Prop. p. 776: "*etiam monet nos uir doctissimus E. Nestle, Hieronymum duobus locis 'de interp. nominum Hebr.' (ed. Uall. III, 34 et 91) de littera H et uoce iesus ita scribere, ubi in litterarum serie a G ad I transiliat.*"

It has been assumed by all writers on the Cross that the figure beneath that of Christ is a falconer. It is *genre*, says Professor Cook, perhaps portraiture. But one seeing Christ in the center, and John the Baptist, presumably, above, and a figure with a bird like an eagle below would naturally suppose that this figure was intended for St. John the Evangelist. That he has no nimbus is also true of St. John Baptist, above. After the famous arguments and councils about Rome vs. Iona, the Evangelist could hardly be left out of such company. And one may appeal to 'art's early wont,' when Christ alone wore the nimbus.

Antecedent improbability of such an artistic creation as the Bewcastle Cross in the seventh century is elaborately argued by Professor Cook. Too much has been made, he thinks, of Wilfrith's

importations of foreign workmen, and of Bede's statements about Benedict Biscop's stonecutters. Bede's reference (Hist. Abbot. 5) is, to be sure, to Biscop's continental journey of 675, four years before Ailguin's death; but we know that King Ecgfrið was an enthusiastic patron not only of Biscop, but also, for a time, of Wilfrith. So far from being improbable, is it not highly probable that men who had been to Rome as many times as had Wilfrith and Biscop could succeed, in their missionary zeal, in importing the best workmen? The universal exaltation and veneration of the cross after Heraclius early in the century would, one is inclined to think, draw upon the best technique of classical art remaining. The Romulus motive on the Franks Casket joins to the Romulus motive on early Saxon coins. The checker pattern on Bewcastle is also a sacred motive in early Saracen design. Of one point about the technique of Bewcastle I feel certain: the hand that decorated the Cross was not the same that chiseled the Runic inscription. This is crude, and shows no such careful planning as is evident elsewhere on the Cross.

Germane to the subject of English Runes is the story of Nennius's invention of an alphabet, a story which both Zeuss-Ebel and Zimmer regarded as negligible in importance. Twitted by a Saxon scholar for having no alphabet—*rudimentum*—Nennius suddenly invented, *ex machinatione mentis*, an alphabet, and gave meanings to each character, as the Saxons did and as the Celts did, later. The order was not that of the *futhorc*, and the *figurae litterarum runicis similes* Zeuss did not print. Zimmer copied them, and prints them in *Nennius Vindictus*, p. 131. Some of the characters are Runic, though not all these of Runic value; some are undoubtedly fanciful: but the effect produced is that of a Runic alphabet. Why, if Nennius had a British alphabet, should he have flattered the Saxon monk by such imitation? And why, when the Roman alphabet was finally adopted by the English, should they have added Runic? The inscription on the Bewcastle Cross seems to me to be a natural mode of English writing in the seventh century.

One may express impatience that no competent geologist has determined the formation from which the Cross was quarried. Traditions that it was found in a local pit, or that it was carried overseas,—one recalls the high tides of the Solway in *Redgauntlet*—might, one would think, be easily denied or confirmed. But why

should the Bewcastle Cross be subjected longer to the weather? From any angle, from that of language, religion, history or art, the Cross is much too precious for further exposure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>References: A. S. Cook, *The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses*, Yale University Press, 1912. *Some Accounts of the Bewcastle Cross*, Yale Studies in English, L, 1914. Review of Browne's *Ancient Cross Shafts at Bewcastle and Ruthwell*, *Modern Language Notes*, June, 1917.

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